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OPEDA

Organization of Professional Employees of the U. S. Department of Agriculture

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GREETINGS FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

One of the interesting and stimulating features of participation in OPEDA's affairs is the widely divergent views expressed by different members. For instance, your officers often hear the belief voiced that OPEDA should give its major effort and attention to material matters, such as pay scales, retirement benefits, leave, and other matters that directly or indirectly touch the pocket-book nerves. Others have indicated that they would be better satisfied with the organization if it gave most of its thought and energy to the stimulation of a greater devotion to the interests of the Department and the general public.

Actually, the individuals are not nearly as far apart as their expressed views would suggest. There are few professional workers who do not get real satisfaction out of a feeling that they have a definite part in a worthwhile job. On the other hand, even the most altruistic among us are not unmindful of the money and other material considerations that go along with the job. Few of us can afford to be unmindful of these matters.

The obvious solution is to press vigorously towards all of these objectives, and with support from the membership OPEDA is certain to do just this. The various committees are working actively towards these ends. The returns from the questionnaire on leave published in this issue will be a valuable guide to the Committee on Economic Criteria in presenting the professional workers' case to the next Congress, which is certain to consider these matters. And the same committee is gathering material and laying the groundwork for the presentation of our viewpoint on the subject of salary increases, which is likewise bound to come up next year. In the meantime other committees are working on the less tangible, though no less real, matters with which we are all concerned.

Greetings of the Season.—Bennet A. Porter.

"THE HOME OFFICE"

OPEDA is fortunate in having Mrs. Mildred G. Pullen continue as financial secretary. In order to facilitate the answering of all types of questions regarding our members, she has each of us filed in such a way that we can be quickly located by geographic unit, Department unit, addressograph code number, or alphabetically by name. After somewhat over a year's connection with OPEDA Mrs. Agnes N. Chowe resigned in July. We are now exceedingly happy to inform you that she returned to the fold on October 1 and is again serving as our very competent and effective administrative assistant in the home office. The new executive officer has come to regard these two assistants as his "seeing-eye ladies."

OPEDA'S AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

(Report of Frederick V. Rand, Executive Officer)

In the September issue of the Newsletter I was introduced—rather too flatteringly, I feel—to you, the members of OPEDA. Perhaps here, at the very beginning of my official relationship, I should now introduce myself in order to dispel any possible over-optimism on the part of those of you who do not know me and to express in some measure my own basic ideas on what a professional organization such as ours should stand for. Not that it differs materially from what I believe are the principles upheld by the overwhelming majority of you, but merely to set the record straight at the beginning of our relationship. Moreover, I fully realize that my chief duty as executive officer will be to "execute" or carry out what you—the officers, the council, and the members as a group—shall determine.

You, of course, will pass upon what phases of OPEDA's diverse objectives need to be stressed at any particular point of time. Do not forget, however, that this is always a two-way street. The elected group in their turn will need from time to time to come back to the members in order to learn what is the "climate of opinion" on those specific objectives and modes of action which you believe most urgent in view of the changing attitudes of the Congress, the Department, and the general public.

Differences of opinion may and will occur among and between these groups. Is it not both our duty and our privilege to make known just where we all stand? And is not free and open discussion the only sensible way in which we may approach a settlement of our differences and arrive at sensible and worthy conclusions on which to act? This is the democratic way.

An immediate case in point is the questionnaire on different types of leave presented in this issue of the OPEDA Newsletter. This is a matter that was approached from various angles by the current session of Congress and one that will almost certainly be taken up by the next. We trust that you will give it your careful attention in order that the "home office" may act according to the dictates of the majority of our membership. Among other matters affecting you as Government employees that are likely to receive attention are annuities and salaries in all their aspects—including increases, either direct or on a cost-of-living basis, overtime pay, severance pay, retirement credit for services under Federal-State cooperative programs, and multiple taxation where an employee lives under one jurisdiction and works under another.

From time to time occasional individual members have asked why OPEDA has all its altruistic objectives spelled out with emphasis and in such detail. "Do not we as pro-

fessional people stand for all these things anyway, because we are professional people?" they ask. I believe this is true for the vast majority of us; we are stirred by many impulses other than those that affect our stomachs and our pocketbooks. At the same time, however, we are human and being human our actions are often determined by mixed motives, with the end result that decisions are sometimes made by overbalancing of the selfish motives, to the detriment of the general good. It is right here that concerted action in the development and spread of attitudes or climates of opinion has its legitimate and useful place.

OPEDA was projected and organized in 1929 because many in the professional (scientific, technical, and administrative) groups felt that they had certain special interests and objectives—both altruistic and personally advantageous—that did not apply in so full a degree to the great bulk of Government workers, and because they felt a real need for an organized means of registering and presenting these special requirements and viewpoints.

As an example of this development of attitudes, a renowned scientist and teacher used to warn his students repeatedly against the dangers of what he called "professionalism." He stressed the importance of the spirit of amateurism: "the devotion of one who is working for the love of his chosen field rather than merely for a living by it." "Avoid any time-serving professionalism," he said. "Work in the spirit of devotion to service. I like to think of Federal workers as holders of honorary fellowships for public service to society through creative effort. If you can't enter your chosen field in that spirit you had far better look elsewhere for your means of livelihood." The result was that hundreds of his students have gone out from him and spread this climate of opinion literally all over the world.

It is this sort of "chain reaction" that has been one of the main objectives of OPEDA from its very beginning. It is not that we should neglect any justifiable advantages to us as professional workers, but rather that the more tangible objectives ought always to be established upon the basic philosophy of our best service to the Department and to the public. This is why we are what we are. Let the promulgation of this climate of opinion come first and all matters of personal advantage will fall into their proper places.

It is only by giving public service dignity and confidence, as well as proper economic rewards more equal to those in private enterprise, that it can continue to be maintained in its fullest effectiveness for the public welfare. I like to think of OPEDA as endeavoring to develop a pattern

somewhat paralleling the type of civil service that has been evolved over the years in Great Britain. In that country a political group originates the general rules and procedures and the public servants carry them through, working out the details in a spirit of deep allegiance *both* to their subordinates and to the best interests of the commonwealth. Through it all they put forth persistent efforts to perfect the foundations on which changing Government policies can be carried out for the best interests both of the Government and of the people at large, while at the same time being obedient to whatever political group is at the moment in power. Likewise, OPEDA and its members can well subordinate their individual interest to the interests of the whole Department and the public. These may properly be the paramount aims of our organization as a background for its thoughts and efforts, while at the same time promoting all legitimate advantages to its individual members.

NEW PERFORMANCE RATINGS

The other day we received this letter from one of our field members: "When I get an idea that seems important I quite often write it up, correct the copy, and get it in shape as if I were a columnist. Then I lay it away for a few days or weeks, reread it, and toss it into the wastebasket. I am sending one of my recent write-ups and will let you decide between the wastebasket and the Congressional Record!"—Then, referring to the recent legislation on "performance ratings," he goes on to say: "I like analogies to blow my top. In this way you can criticize without going all out to rant directly against something that generally is pretty good.—About once a year it's my habit to buy a new pair of shoes, sometimes 8C and again 9B. Both sizes seem to fit well enough. I buy shoes of the sort you can wear for Sunday if you want to. They look O.K. and are nothing to be ashamed of at all, but not so fine that I can't step out and do a good day's work in them. All in all they suit me fine. This year, so I am told, I can't for some reason or other get just what I want. Seems they are streamlining the retail shoe business. They carry rejects that customers can pick up on the way out. For a few, these are really fine shoes in all sizes; I don't exactly want them—they are a bit too highly polished and any scratches really show up. I am a bit afraid my friends would want to 'spit on 'em' like we used to do back when we were kids. The rest of the stock is about the same as last year, some O.K. but rather cheap and a bit shoddy, some just average, and others really sort of nice. I can get my size, I think, but each pair is wrapped and all tied up. The clerk says he is sorry but he can't unwrap them. I'll just have to take a package as is—size 8C or maybe 9B. Almost everyone will be treated the same but even so I'm not too pleased either. We can't figure out why such a good retail shoe store would make such a crazy ruling."

Many employees, in one way or another, have expressed this fear that the new rating system would result in a "cut and dried" practice of placing the great bulk of Government workers under one inclusive category

without reference to differing *grades* of "satisfactoriness." Some explanations seem in order. Under the old system, one rather complicated set of basic points was used in rating all types of employee functions. Under this system it was often difficult to fit these points to specific types of work and in many instances dissatisfaction and disruption of morale followed. The new law was purposely made broad, with its detailed implementation left to the Civil Service Commission in cooperation with the individual departments. The Commission has already circulated its basic regulations to the departments and as we go to press Agriculture is in process of fitting them to its own particular requirements. "In general, the purpose of the plan is to improve administration and thereby to increase the efficiency and effectiveness with which the work of the Department is carried on. More specifically, this purpose will be achieved through: The development of objective performance requirements for employees; the making known of such requirements to the employees; the systematic appraisal of performance in relation to the known requirements; the improvement of performance where required to meet the established standards; the improvement of supervisor-employee relationships through increased mutual understanding of the objectives of the work and of the amount, kind, and methods of work considered to be satisfactory."

In a recent memorandum to the Department's Personnel Director, OPEDA's president states that: "While the members of our organization have not been in a position to give too much study to the *New Performance Rating legislation*, it is apparent from our discussion of the subject at a recent council meeting that we subscribe wholeheartedly to the avowed purpose of the act—i.e., to simplify the efficiency rating system and to improve the relationships between supervisors and employees. To that end, we urgently recommend that the plan of operation be kept simple and practicable and that it be made broad enough to permit flexibility in meeting the operating conditions in each of the bureaus and agencies within the Department. We believe these two principles are indispensable if we are to reap any benefits at all from an entirely new system."

OPEDA LUNCHEONS

The popular luncheon programs for the D. C. area were resumed in October with a panel discussion led by Paul V. Kepner (Ext.) on the relations of the Department with its field agencies. Phillip F. Aylesworth (Sec. Off.) explained the ways in which the USDA Councils work for better mutual understanding and coordination between the Department and its field personnel; Arthur B. Thatcher (P. & O.) pled for consideration and action in providing common office buildings for county representatives of the Department's field agencies; and T. Roy Reid (Pers.) stressed the need for better understanding in Washington of the objectives, operations, and problems of the various agency programs in order to insure a more united front.

These luncheons are regularly

scheduled for the third Tuesday of each month, October through June, in Room 6962 South Building. Field members visiting Washington are especially invited to attend and participate in these lively discussions.

MEMBERSHIP STATUS

The palm for bringing in new members to OPEDA this fall goes to Franklin D. Van Sant; he brought in 36 from Farm Credit Administration! We are not afraid of a crowd; who is next? All in all some 300 new members have been added since September 30. Moreover, none have withdrawn except 10 on account of retirement, and some of these have reconsidered on being told this is no bar to membership. The total membership as of December 12 was approximately 2,900.

SALARIES VS. LIVING COSTS

A subcommittee of the *Economic Criteria Committee* was appointed to make a study of increases in cost of living as compared to increases in salaries of Federal employees. The subcommittee did not make any startling discoveries of information which is not already available to all Federal employees; that is, that the cost of living has increased much more rapidly than Federal employees' salaries. It did bring together some statistics which show a comparison of these increases. For example, the cost of living index based on the period 1935-39 as a norm of 100 had increased by July 15, 1950, to 172.5. During recent months, the cost of living index has continued to increase as follows: August 15, 173.0; September 15, 173.8; October 15, 174.8. In comparison, employees' salaries have been increased over the 1935-39 period as follows: GS-5, 55%; GS-9, 43%; GS-12, 39%; GS-13 and 14, 35%. So we see that the cost of living has increased more than twice as much as the salary of a GS-13 or GS-14 employee and almost 50% more than the salary of a GS-5 employee.

OPEDA will present the information which it has compiled to the proper congressional committees in order to acquaint them with the seriousness of the situation as it pertains to professional employees. It does not appear at all likely that any action will be taken in the present short session of Congress. It is hoped, however, that Members of Congress will recognize the ever-widening gap between the income of Federal employees and the expenditures necessary to provide the necessities of life for the employees and their families.—C. K. Morrison, Chairman.

ISSUES INVOLVED IN ESTABLISHING PUBLIC SERVICE CRITERIA

The *Committee on Public Service Criteria* recognizes that its most difficult task is to so formulate a statement of criteria that it may not consist merely of a list of pious promises to the public or a set of shibboleths which are so vague as to have little meaning in terms of day-by-day professional employment. The committee has therefore during the past year spent very little time on an at-

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QUESTIONNAIRE ON ANNUAL AND SICK LEAVE

On November 1, Mr. C. K. Morrison, chairman of OPEDA's Committee on Economic Criteria, submitted the attached questionnaire and background material prepared by Messrs. Harold Stone and George Hanna, following a full discussion of the matter at the October 23 meeting of the council. Will you kindly give it careful attention and return promptly to OPEDA.

Why You Should Answer The Questionnaire

From time to time, and particularly during the past year, the officers of OPEDA have appeared voluntarily or by request before congressional committees to express the views of the members on annual and sick leave. Although they have advocated retention of the present leave policies, it has become increasingly difficult to support this position in the face of very searching questions from committee members; they have also been embarrassed by not actually knowing the views of the OPEDA membership. It is therefore *important* that your officers, in representing the membership before Congress, know what leave policies you think are adequate and equitable. This is why your officers urge you to answer the attached questionnaire.

The following comments will give you some background for a better understanding of the questions:

(1) Since 1936 most permanent civil-service Government employees have received 26 days of annual and 15 days of sick leave each calendar year. Unused annual and sick leave could be carried over until the accumulations reached 60 days for annual and 90 days for sick leave. During World War II the maximum accumulation of annual leave was temporarily raised to 90 days. In September 1950 Congress prohibited the carrying over into the fiscal year 1952 of any unused annual leave earned in 1950. It is possible that a similar provision may be enacted in the appropriation bill each year, which, in effect, would abolish the practice of accumulating leave. The 1950 change did not, however, affect existing accumulations.

(2) Vacations are generally viewed as necessary for mental and physical recreation in order that the employee may maintain and perhaps increase his ability to do his job well.

(3) The attitude of some members of Congress during the past year was to favor a reduction in the length of vacations and also in the amount of sick leave. The two reasons most frequently given are thus summarized:

(a) Government employees receive longer vacations than employees in private employment, and the practice of accumulating leave is seldom found in industry. (Two full days off out of seven is pointed to as a factor.)

(b) One way to reduce Government expenditures is to cut the vacation period; another is to reduce the outstanding financial liability of the Government by abolishing the practice of

accumulating leave. (This outstanding liability amounts to millions of dollars.)

(4) The funds of the Department of Agriculture and its bureaus are often heavily burdened by an unanticipated expenditure for accrued leave when a larger than usual number of employees withdraw from the service because of death, retirement, reduction in force, etc. This budgetary problem has become acute in recent years.

(5) One factor accentuating the budgetary problem is that as of June 30, 1950, there were 11,141 or 19 percent of full-time employees in positions under the Classification Act of 1949 of the Department having accumulated leave as of January 1, 1950, in excess of 60 days and in many cases approaching or equal to 90 days. The majority of these employees are in grades 7 and above. Several schemes have been advanced to liquidate the excess over 60 days—payment in bonds or cash; actual taking of leave within, say, a 5-year period, after which it would be lost; etc.

(6) Senator Douglas introduced two bills, S. 3394 and S. 3395, on April 11, 1950, which, if adopted, would reduce annual leave to a maximum of 20 days. One of these bills provides for a graduated amount of leave depending on length of service—10 days up to three years of service, 15 days from three to ten years, and 20 days for more than ten years of service. Both bills would, if adopted, reduce sick leave to 12 days.

(7) Since the Government has not provided severance pay, some employees view accumulated annual leave as a safety measure in case of separation from service. However, the amount of annual leave accumulated varies with each employee, and many employees have little or no accumulation. On June 30, 1950, 22.2 percent of the number of full-time career employees of the Department of Agriculture in continental United States had 5 days or less accumulated leave. At the other extreme, 19 percent had more than 60 days. Senator Johnston of South Carolina introduced a bill, S. 3074, on February 20, 1950, to provide severance pay. If adopted, severance pay would be equal to one day's basic compensation at time of separation multiplied by number of months of continuous service, up to 90. Such severance pay would be given only for involuntary separation; it would not be given at time of retirement, for voluntary resignation, or for removal for misconduct or delinquency.

(8) There are several arguments for retaining the 26 days of annual leave. Washington employees are recruited from all the States and do not necessarily look upon Washington as their home. Many retain their voting residence outside this area. It is common practice among Washington employees to go home to vote and for a visit, charging the time to annual leave. To make such trips worth while an employee should be permitted a reasonable length of time, par-

ticularly if the travel distance is great. Field employees may be confronted with a similar problem, especially if they are frequently transferred.

Another argument in favor of 26 days is that the Government has been urging industry to be more liberal in granting its employees various benefits such as vacation time. There has been a trend upward in recent years in the amount of time granted by private employers for vacations. It appears, therefore, that the Government might well set as an example to industry what it believes to be a reasonable policy on leave.

(9) In comparisons of the Government employee with his counterpart in industry, two entirely different concepts prevail in regard to leave or vacation time. A Government employee is expected to charge to leave every absence, no matter how minor, if he is not engaged upon official business. Extra time taken out for attending to personal matters is charged against leave. Such charges should not be considered as vacation periods. It is not known how much of the 26 days employees use for miscellaneous periods of time off. It is probably a considerable proportion. On the other hand, such a practice is not found in industry, where cases are generally treated on an individual basis and time off to attend occasionally to personal matters is generally permitted. If the period of 26 days should be reduced, there is the real possibility that employees would have an insufficient amount of time for vacation under the present practice of charging leave for personal matters. Moreover, the employee in industry generally receives certain other benefits denied Federal employees, such as unemployment compensation under State unemployment insurance plans as well as termination pay, which in some States is required by law.

(10) Several members of OPEDA have expressed the desire of being able to return to school in order to improve themselves and thus be better able to carry on their work in the Government. It is not easy for an employee to bear the personal expense of what might be called "sabbatical leave" as is the practice in collegiate institutions. Employees have often used their accumulated annual leave for this purpose. This Department supported a bill, S. 2111, in which section 11 provides for educational leave. It is understood that the Budget Bureau favored this provision. Thus there are two ways of approaching the subject of educational leave—by joining it with annual leave, or by dealing with it as a separate problem. However, it is very difficult to present a convincing argument to Congress that leave for physical and mental recreation should be joined with leave for educational advancement.

(11) A number of employees favor the idea of combining annual and sick leave into one type of leave. They argue that the temptation for abuse would be removed, and that the costs of administering leave would be reduced.

ISSUES

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tempt to do either of these things. Instead it has given its serious attention to an analysis of (a) the conditions under which professional employees can make their greatest contributions in Government service, (b) the organization and operation of administration and procedures which will further these objectives, and (c) a consideration of the ways in which professional employees can and should serve the public.

The committee is assuming that professional employees are governed and guided by the following motives: (a) Loyalty to the standards and accomplishments in the professional fields to which they have dedicated their lives, (b) service to the public through professional accomplishment and service, (c) professional status and recognition, and (d) adequate income. It assumes that to the extent to which a professional employee can maintain high standards of integrity in both professional accomplishment and in public services he will probably be satisfied with his professional and public status, and to the extent that he has professional status and adequate income he will work at his profession and in the public service with high zest.

The committee has thus far attempted to make some appraisal of those conditions which handicap and those which facilitate high levels of performance. It appears that the things which handicap the highest levels of performance are:

(1) On the part of the professional employee: (a) His failure to be motivated and guided by the highest standards of his own chosen profession, (b) an insistence that he be privileged, in fact endowed, to pursue his professional zest with no regard to public service, (c) failure to subordinate his personal ambitions to his professional duties, (d) failure to recognize that he is a member of a team and therefore failure to help develop an esprit de corps in the organization of which he is a part, and (e) undue concern about salary and status.

(2) On the part of Government employment: (a) Restrictions on the practice of the highest standards of his profession, (b) the diversion of his time to activities which waste or do not utilize his highest professional talents, (c) inefficiencies or conflicts in administration which create an unfavorable climate for the exercise of his talents and efforts and which thus frustrate him professionally, and (d) administrative jurisdictions with which he is not professionally concerned but which handicap his best professional efforts.

The committee has made a very brief trial survey of professional employees' opinions concerning the professional advantages and disadvantages of Government employment. In terms of a weighted average measure-

ment of the advantages named, the rank order was as follows: (1) Opportunities for national and even world-wide professional activities; (2) opportunities to work with competent professionals in associated fields; (3) security of tenure, retirement annuities, and adequate leave; (4) adequate library services and research materials; (5) opportunity to work in the public service and for the general welfare; (6) adequate salaries; and (7) loyalties inspired because of working for the Government (that is, all the people) rather than one agency or group.

The disadvantages in order were: (1) Threats of unfavorable publicity, misinterpretation of professional intentions, etc.; (2) restrictions on carrying through projects, varying budgets, planning with others, etc.; (3) excessive time often required in committees, in working on budgets, and in correspondence; (4) lower salaries than in some other types of professional employment; (5) greater degree of regimentation, hours, arrangements of duties, style of writing, etc.; (6) arbitrariness of Government as an employer; and (7) restriction on professional publications.

The committee will continue to make analyses of the above type and attempt to formulate a list of criteria which are realistic in terms of its findings.—*Carl C. Taylor, Chairman.*

WORKING CRITERIA FOR EQUIPPING DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES

Equipping of employees to perform their work more effectively is always an important subject for consideration. Particularly is this true at a time such as this when in all segments of the Nation's economy we are "tightening our belts" with respect to manpower, resources, and equipment.

Naturally, the effective equipment of the Department's employees is primarily a responsibility of that organization and its constituent units. However, the knowledge, attitudes, and co-operation of OPEDA's members, along with other employees, do determine to a large extent the degree to which the Department and its agencies reach that goal. Since the twofold objective of OPEDA involves the basic welfare both of its members and of the Nation as a whole, it seems appropriate to emphasize this matter persistently in order to facilitate sound operation of the Department and effective service to the public; without these considerations, OPEDA objectives are impossible of attainment. The basic attitude of our members, and their official recommendations and actions based thereon, might well represent a core for the Department's efforts along these lines.

The "equipping of an employee" is here intended to suggest an improvement in the services of all employees through more equitable supervision and guidance, better office and labora-

tory facilities, and more suitable transportation and field equipment, rather than the narrower connotation of expendable and non-expendable property alone. To be sure, two persons properly equipped may perform a particular piece of work better than three persons with inadequate or ill-adapted facilities. Conversely, however, three persons may do other jobs more efficiently and effectively than two persons with ill-adapted and costly non-expendable equipment. The optimum equipment is that combination of personal services, facilities, and apparatus that results in the performance of a task most adequately within the time allotted and with the minimum of total input. Either more or less than the optimum is wasteful. It is important to remember, however, that the ingenuity of an employee often results in sound accomplishment both as to quality and quantity, even though some might consider him inadequately equipped.

In a department with about 60,000 employees responsible for both expendable and non-expendable public property (exclusive of real property) estimated at about a quarter of a billion dollars in value, the necessity for effective use of services and property is obvious. In other words, over- or under-buying, -stocking, or -staffing inevitably leads to inefficiency.

The work of the Department is probably too broad and complex for any specific set of criteria to be universally applicable, but generalized criteria may well be represented by the following questions with respect to each type of work: 1. Is effective use being made of the complementary personal services, facilities, and equipment available? 2. Is the most effective combination of services, facilities, and equipment available? 3. Is the proper latitude and guidance provided for the exercise of employee ingenuity in getting the job done? The continual use by OPEDA members of the criteria implied by these questions should serve to further improve the Department's work and thereby to aid in attaining the objectives of our organization.

In short, the challenge to each member of this important group of professional employees is twofold: First, to develop in the individual's own thinking such criteria as will stand the test of careful scrutiny and, second, to make sure that he as an individual does everything possible in his official capacity, whatever that may be, to render proper accountability for the equipment as well as the services for which he is responsible. OPEDA may set up criteria that look well on paper and sound reasonable in discussion, but the actual attainment of any goal that may be set is a job for the individual member working within his own official field of responsibility.—*Committee on Working Criteria, Carl Colvin, Chairman.*

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